



January 10, 2002

An Open Letter to the Residents of Oak Park:

Contrary to what you may have heard or read, the Eisenhower Expressway is not on the verge of growing wider. Rather, the possibility of reconfiguring traffic activity within the current right-of-way is being studied by the state, but no plan has been developed and no construction money has been allocated. Alarms recently sounded have done little to inform residents since the state is still in the information gathering and planning process. Unfortunately, such premature speculation has only served to unnecessarily frighten those whose property abuts the expressway.

Even though no plans for the Eisenhower are part of the state's 2002-2006 highway construction improvement program, the Illinois Department of Transportation has begun preliminary engineering and environmental studies, and has asked communities along the expressway from Chicago to Hillside to supply traffic and accident reports, steps that suggest some change to this critical roadway is at least a future consideration. As soon as these investigative steps were initiated by IDOT last year, the Village began identifying community and municipal resources available to help ensure that whatever decision the state might make will have minimal negative impact on the community. In fact, much of the preparatory work to fashion an effective response to any proposed action on the expressway actually has been underway for nearly a year now.

The most critical step in the Village's response is to retain technical and legal support and guidance to ensure the community's position, concerns and needs are presented effectively in Congress and the State Legislature where the authority for any future actions on the Eisenhower will emanate. The selection process is well underway, and should be completed soon. A comprehensive response strategy then can be developed with the help of professionals who understand the technical aspects of the process, the applicable law and the options the Village must consider in a response to any IDOT proposal.

Residents will need to play key roles in the Village response, too. Experienced, knowledgeable members of our business and residential communities are being asked to join a citizen advisory panel to help study the issues, monitor developments and create a strategic response to any action IDOT might ultimately propose. We also hope that residents who wish to actively participate in the process will focus some of their energies toward the entities that have direct control over the future of the Eisenhower, such as IDOT, the State Legislature and Congress.

In addition to rallying community resources, the Village also intends to form alliances with other communities that could be affected to develop a unified response to any IDOT plans for the Eisenhower, including Bellwood, Broadview, Forest Park, Maywood and Westchester. IDOT plans will need to become more detailed before the role of such alliances can be determined and articulated.

Some have said more pressure should be brought to bear upon state transportation officials to make them spell out just what their intentions might be. Unfortunately, such a call for action offers little practical guidance for influencing transportation planners at this time. Once IDOT has developed preliminary plans, the agency is required by federal law to seek public comment and review before any of its projects can be finalized. IDOT officials have indicated that initial plans will not be ready until much later this year. Village staff is in contact with IDOT, however, and will continue to press for any information that might develop.

Residents should keep in mind that any significant change to the expressway actually might also create opportunities for the Village to garner state and federal funds for improvements along the roadway. These improvements could help ease not only future impacts, but may help address long-standing issues as well, such as noise, pollution and even the physical division of the community the expressway created.

Whatever plan IDOT might ultimately propose, noise, air pollution and other community impacts would have to be considered, as well alternative means to address I-290 congestion such as a western extension of the CTA Blue Line. Residents can rest assured

that the Village will insist that all alternatives be objectively explored and analyzed, and all environmental impacts be fully addressed and mitigated.

The important thing for Oak Parkers to remember is that by getting involved actively at this early stage of the process, the Village is in a fairly strong position to influence IDOT plans. At the same time, however, we should not be alarmist. A situation of this magnitude with such far-reaching potential impact on our community needs to be approached strategically and with thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Village President Joanne E. Trapani